

SAPONI - Spaces and Projects of National Importance

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Summary

Summary

How this book came into being and what it is about

This book came out of a symposium trilogy on spaces and projects of national importance (SAPONI) held at ETH Zurich that involved many notable European spatial planning experts. What happens around SAPONIs is not only important for the respective spatial areas, it is also in the interests of the entire nation and sometimes even in European interests as well. These spaces and projects can have far-reaching consequences and opportunities that could be used – or they could be lost. Therefore, it is of extraordinary importance, especially from a national point of view, to create an overview of these spaces. The starting point for this overview is the difficult and comprehensive tasks of spatial development that are spatially located and, in general, can only be solved through the interaction of spatially important actors on the local, regional, and national levels. The experts are all in agreement on this.

Major challenges in the coming decades

In the next few decades, spatial planning will face major challenges. These include providing high-capacity infrastructure, the containment of sprawl, and the design and organisation of cultural landscapes. The changing demands and requirements from social change, climate change, questions of future mobility and the safe and environmentally friendly provision of energy must also be taken into consideration. The worldwide exchange of goods and people and the real-time exchange of information will not only further strengthen global interdependence, it will also push global competition even further, whether it is for Europe as a continent or for the individual countries.

Now, as before, spatial planning must regulate this development through a legal and formal framework in order to organise it to some extent and, if possible, to steer it towards sustainability. But, this alone is no longer sufficient for the foresight needed and the early recognition of tasks of national importance with their opportunities and risks. Spatial planning must be more strongly action-oriented in order to meet the challenges and be able to take advantage of the opportunities. By and large, initiatives, apart from the formal processes, are required from actors who are active in spatial planning in order to bring all stakeholders together through facing difficult tasks, and, in appropriate processes, to seek solutions and take advantage of opportunities. In these processes, actors at the national and regional spatial planning levels have a special orientation and motivational obligation to initiate appropriate processes.

When large-scale spatial planning not only responds to development in the form of taking a position and making professional reports, but also takes the initiative and brings together spatially relevant actors, it will need special means for special processes and their appropriate communication, especially for the public. In this future position of spatial planning, there is full agreement among the experts that both solutions and initiatives will crystallise out in the course of the discussion of the case studies. There is also agreement that an overview of the

spaces and projects of national importance is missing in most cases, although it is an important foundation for establishing a focus in the future, especially considering the consistently limited resources available.

Knowledge gained from case studies, reflections on the most important aspects

The case studies from the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany, Scandinavia, France, Austria and Switzerland make it clear, however, that the planning cultures, the understanding of the tasks and the uses of successful methods and instruments in these countries are quite different, as are the examples themselves. These extend from cross-border corridor projects through eco-towns up to a focus on individual metropolitan regions. An essential feature of the projects is their complexity and large scale.

Once more, it has been confirmed that spatial planning is a discipline that is linked to language, culture and paradigms. For these reasons alone, mutual understanding is already a major challenge. Nevertheless, the cross-border dialogue is important in order to recognise new developments, attain new knowledge and stimulate and encourage through discussions – perhaps even formulate new initiatives.

Through the exchange that took place during the symposia and the discussions of the case studies, the knowledge that a pan-European spatial planning does not exist has become a consensus. The increased development of trans-European infrastructural networks, for example, the energy sector (such as cable and pipeline routes) and the transport sector already call for this development. This shows that sector development is very often neglected during the customary development of the living space. A compilation of the spaces and projects of national importance in the individual countries would be a very good foundation for the spaces and projects that lie within mutual European interests.

Against such a background, the intention of this book is not to communicate patent prescriptions; it is rather an approach to this important topic. It illustrates the spaces and projects of national importance through case studies from very different regions of Europe and should increase sensibility for this kind of perception and approach. Within the framework of the symposium, the experts have debated which aspects of this issue are important and present their personal reflections here in this book, for example: Reflections on the role of EU, Reflections on planning systems and politics and Reflections on strategies and different political systems.

How to read this book

The structure of this book is designed so that individual contributions can be read without reading the entire book or reading it in order.

The book contains six chapters and an appendix. The introductory section covers the genesis of the SAPONI concept. Chapters 2

and 3 delve into the questions of the why, what, who and how of SAPONIs, followed by the key features of SAPONIs. Chapter 4 is a series of selected case studies that illustrate and deepen the issues of SAPONIs and underline the strong connections to language, culture and paradigms. Based on the case studies and some observations, the questions are followed by what we can learn from the case studies about the identification, investigation and realisation of SAPONIs. Chapter 5 presents the personal reflections of the symposium participants, which are of special significance for this theme. Finally, a set of conclusions is presented in chapter 6. It brings together the important knowledge gained in this process and suggests potential actions to be taken.

Preface

Preface

Spatial development in Europe is now facing unprecedented major challenges. As before, the expansion of settlement areas continues to draw on valuable cultural land, the overload from large infrastructures keeps increasing and, under tight financial conditions, the development of a major transportation infrastructure can no longer keep up with the desired economic development. Especially in numerous eastern European countries, there are still extensive environmental protection problems to be solved, for example, the processing of waste water. Among the challenges is the development of a comprehensive approach to the spatial impacts and the consequences of changes in society, climate and technology.

The core task of spatial planning is the orderly, sustainable design of our living spaces. For about a half-century, spatial planning has been embedded in the law as an institutionalised public function and is therefore part of the function of public administration and decision-making. The various levels of spatial planning have, depending on the respective countries, a variety of regulations and quite different jurisdictions. The planning culture in interaction with spatially relevant actors is likewise quite different. Spatial planning is a discipline that is deeply bound to language, culture and paradigm.

This situation raises the question of how solutions for national and European important spaces and projects can emerge and what roles the various actors will play. In order to answer these questions, it must first be clarified whether the individual countries are even aware of „Spaces and Projects of National Importance“ and how this should be handled. (It is important to note that one must always be careful with the introduction of new planning terms and categories. Nothing is more damaging than to contribute to confusing terminology.) It was obvious that a survey of European countries was needed in order to ascertain whether this theme played a role and when yes, how it was handled in the individual countries. To come to the point: the answer to the introduction of the concept of Spaces and Projects of National Importance is a clear yes. From a European perspective, there are various reasons for needing such a concept and there are totally different means of handling the areas that would fall under the term.

In a sequence of SAPONIs, as we are calling the respective symposia of 2008, 2009 and 2010, case studies were distilled and positions and arguments were developed and strengthened. By the end of 2010, we had the opportunity to present our findings within the framework of the Master of Advanced Studies (MAS) Programme in Spatial Planning of ETH Zurich. In the process, it became clear, for the students rather unusually, how natural the dialogue about European borders has become and how strongly the fundamental positions agree. That encouraged us to collect our results, observations and experiences in a publication on the SAPONI.

The present book is based on the discourse about the current state of selected national planning systems and on the assessment of experts based on the related national planning systems. This dialogue has been supported through the use of case studies, which are presented in a separate chapter of this book. In order to focus on the comparisons of the individual case studies, this presentation has been given a standardised format. The authors have provided a detailed view of their cases studies in the annex.

The discursive approach and the involvement of responsible national planning experts in the research emphasises the process of identification and the development of the core of SAPONI. The present book is not a representative state-of-the-art study, it is more a coloured overview of the on-going phenomenon of SAPONI.

We hope this book will stimulate discussions and debates in the various countries and, most important, that it will make it clear that, independent of the respective political systems, the importance of national spatial planning is requisite and will continue to increase – as we think it must.

Our thanks go to all the contributors to the SAPONI symposia, most especially, the authors of the individual contributions, the editors' group, the Director of Studies of the MAS Programme in Spatial Planning ETH Zurich and the Coordinator and Secretary of the events.

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Zurich, November 2011